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REASON, DESIRE, AND SEXUALITY: THE MEANING OF GENDER IN NORTHERN AFGANISTAN

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Abstract: Based on field data obtained in a traditional urban ethnic group in northern Afghanistan, the paper views gender as symbolic meanings mediated and interpreted through social experience and social discourse. Analysis indicates that a crucial component of gender ideology includes the idea that reason and desire struggle for control of a person. Sexuality must be controlled so that desire does not subvert the social and moral order. Two interrelated sets of gender concepts are also discussed: symbolic statements about the "nature" of men and women and symbolic statements about the "interaction" of men and women. The latter includes ideas about marriage, veiling, and adultery. An indigenous symbol of female power and sexuality, the almasti, a witchlike figure, is linked to concepts of pollution from menstrual blood and makes a statement about woman's passionate and uncontrolled nature. Throughout the analysis the focus is on traditional norms, values, and attitudes which have particular salience given the Islamic resurgence in Afghanistan today.

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REASON, DESIRE, AND SEXUALITY:
THE MEANING OF GENDER IN NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN

Gender and sexuality can be viewed as symbols that are given meaning by societies through the interrelation and interpretation of social experience and social discourse. This paper will interpret and interrelate the various symbolic elements of gender ideology for a northern Afghanistan group. Using comparative materials from other Middle Eastern societies, analysis in this case will show that a crucial component of gender ideology includes the idea that desire and reason struggle for control of a person and that struggle is conducted in everyday life under constant evaluation by the self and others.

Further, the argument here proposes that two intrinsic aspects of gender ideology are present and that, depending on context, both men and women will switch from one aspect to the other when describing their own and the other sex. The two aspects may be summarized as categorical statements concerning the "nature" of man and woman, and evaluative statements concerning the "inter-action" of men and women. An indigenous Central Asian symbol of female power and sexuality, the almasti, a witchlike figure, is linked to concepts of pollution from menstrual blood and makes a statement about woman's nature. Eating, marriage, veiling, and adultery -- a structural set for both men and women in native ideology -- are key symbols which deal with the interaction between men and women.

A variety of sources are used in the analysis, including Islamic texts used in local mosque schools, interview statements, descriptions of incidents, informant narratives, and secondary sources on neighboring societies. Generally referred to as hermeneutics, this method compares one interpretation with another, or sets differing perceptions against each other. Through a successive building of texts and actions treated as texts, an interpretation of the gender ideology is constructed (Marcus and Fischer 1986:30).

Data for the interpretation developed here were collected from male and female informants during 1976-77 in Kunduz, a provincial capital in northern Afghanistan. Field research focused on a neighborhood (mahalla) dominated by an immigrant community which had come into the area from Soviet Uzbekistan during the 1920s and 1930s. As Slobin has noted (1976:12), these immigrants are known as muhajirin, a term sometimes translated as "refugees." People in other ethnic groups call them Fārghanachi, a reference to their origin in the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan.

The muhajirin are a traditional urban merchant class ethnic group predominantly made up of shopkeepers in northern Afghan cities and Kabul, the Afghan capital, until the 1978 Marxist revolution and subsequent Soviet invasion. They were particularly important in retail sales of traditional Uzbek clothes. Some had moved into modern technology areas such as radio sales and repair. As a minority group, they lacked access to government positions and elite status. Though some joined the mujahidin, freedom fighters engaged in guerilla warfare against the Soviets, many now reside in

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.[1] The muhajirin share common urban patterns of the structural separation of men and women found in many parts of the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa.

The ethnographic literature on the Middle East has described various modes of sexual segregation: husbands and wives not walking together; separate celebrations; separate religious activities; friendships with members of the same sex; separate schools; men spending their time, except for eating and sleeping, outside the household; and women spending their time inside the household (Fernea 1965, Beck and Keddie 1978, Papanek and Minault 1982). All of these manifestations of gender-based segregation are traditional commonplace behaviors for the muhajirin.

The Islamic Theory of Personhood and Gender

To understand the Islamic theory of the nature of humanity, gender, and society to which the muhajirin subscribe, three interrelated terms must be defined: fitna (chaos, disorder), nafs (desire), and 'aql (reason). Living creatures, humans, animals, and jinn, supernatural beings created from fire, possess nafs.[2] The Qur'an describes three characteristics that comprise human nafs: the part of nafs that remains tranquil because of faith in God (mutma'inna); the part that censors or upbraids a person for behaving improperly (lawwāma); and the part that urges a person toward performing evil, especially lustful, deeds (ammāra) (Gibb and Kramers 1953:433; al-Din 1980:97-101).

The nafs of desire (the most common usage of the term) must be controlled by 'aql through education and discipline. The person who is properly instructed and molded seeks to act with propriety (adab) at all times (Israel and Wagle 1983:24). The development of 'aql is a lifelong process based on acquiring knowledge ('ilm) from the study of the Qur'an, hadith, and shari'a which provide a guide for living correctly in the world. To know God's will, to act accordingly, and thus to be a good Muslim are part of the intrinsically related process of achieving human potential (Lapidus 1984:39, 56; Metcalf 1984a:9; Shahrani 1985:28). 'Aql disciplines the nafs; not by destroying it, but by channeling it toward legitimate social purpose (Farah 1984:33, 53; Lapidus 1984; Metcalf 1984b). If used in the proper way through marriage, nafs builds the Muslim community through the propagation of children, but nafs unrestrained by 'aql creates fitna (disorder) (Rosen 1978:566-7; Mernissi 1975:1).

In addition to the orthodox Muslim theologians whose interpretation of these concepts has influenced popular views, sufi traditions are also a source of contemporary ideology. Sentiments such as these written by al-Suhrawardi in the thirteenth century are typical: "Shaitān [satan] adorneth the worthless majesty of nafs; and restless for it maketh souls and hearts, so that he may make low the exalted soul and pollute the purified heart" (1891:73). Al-Suhrawardi mentions that the source of blameable qualitites in man is nafs, and the source of the laudable qualities is ruh [the soul].[3] The blameable qualities are desire, hypocrisy, obstinacy

against God, pride, avarice and parsimony, greediness, levity, haste to fatigue, and negligence (1891:74-6).

Contemporary views on the struggle with nafs are found in popular Islamic texts compiled from various sources and used in local mosque schools in urban and rural areas throughout Afghanistan (Shahrani 1985). Kulliyāti Chahār Kitāb[4] was the text used by the muhajirin in their local mosque school during the period of fieldwork. It includes the following poetic homilies:

> The desire to give up nafs is weak, the worship of God will weaken nafs. Anyone who gives up hedonism, he will overcome the oppressive nafs. If one behaved according to his carnāl desire, how could one make jihad [struggle] with nafs. The killing of nafs may not be possible except by means of the use of the dagger of silence, the sword of hunger, or the spear of solitude and humility. If you want to kill the div [demon] of nafs, you must stay away from the haram [forbidden]. If you are a slave of your sexual desire, even if you think you are free, you are a prisoner (Kulliyāt n.d.:188-200).

Thus, the muhajir views conform to standard Islamic conceptions of nafs, 'aql, and fitna. Throughout northern Afghanistan, individuals, families, and entire ethnic groups are evaluated and labeled according to Islamic norms derived from this conceptual framework.[5]

As human beings, both men and women have nafs and 'aql (Metcalf 1983:24; 1984a:4; see also Rosen 1984:32). But another strand of the traditional ideology equates women with nafs. Women during their life cycle do not usually develop as much 'aql as men. Actually, the proportion of these properties may differ at various stages in the life cycle. Men may consistently increase their 'aql throughout their lifetime through the study of the Qur'an, while women who have more 'aql in childhood lose it after marriage as their sexual desires awaken (Dwyer 1978:98).

> . . . Women are seen as possessing extremely intense desires which, untempered by an equally well-developed reasoning ability, are capable of wreaking havoc on the established social order. Men, in turn, are extremely vulnerable to the feminine sexual onslaught, simply because the best among them still possess passions of their own (Rosen 1984:37).

Women's nafs must therefore be controlled to prevent men from becoming distracted from their religious and social duties. "The social order is secured when the woman limits herself to her husband and does not create fitna or chaos by enticing other men to illicit intercourse" (Mernissi 1975:10). Women are then, often portrayed as sexually insatiable since their innate passions have overwhelmed their reason. Furthermore, informants from many parts of the Middle East, including northern Afghanistan, say that a man and a woman alone together will have sexual relations since the woman tempts and the man cannot resist (Beck and Keddie

1978:13). Informants also note that this situation is prevented through the mechanisms of seclusion and veiling.

Kulliyāt gives evidence for the association of women with nafs:

> Four things are harmful to kings: laughing aloud in public; talking to any poor fellow who comes along; spending too much time with women; and acting oppressively and unjustly toward his subjects. Four things bring defeat upon men: having many enemies; heavy indebtedness; empty pockets; and many wives. The four mistakes which must be avoided are: expecting fidelity from woman; telling one's secrets to someone who has not been tested; trusting one's security to the witless; and seeking companionship from the immature. The characteristics of the witless and ignorant are companionship with the immature and preoccupation with women and sex (Kulliyāt n.d.:186-200) (underscoring added).

Thus women are linked with such vices as overspending, infidelity, telling secrets, immaturity, witlessness, excessive laughing, and injustice, all of which result from 'aql's failure to restrain intense nafs. In addition, laziness, immodesty, propensity to gossip, anger, concern with self-adornment, and lack of concern for housewifely tasks are commonly considered women's faults and are perceived to be the consequence of excessive or unrestrained nafs (Jarring 1951:88-89; Pastner 1974:410; Metcalf 1983:27).[6]

Further evidence of the linkage of nafs and women are statements within the Sufi tradition. From Ibn al-Arabi's story of Satan is: "No woman goes out without a devil sitting at her backside and another at her privates; they make her attractive..." (Conrad 1981:59). Al-Suhrawardi on woman's nature writes: "Havva's [Eve] birth from Adam is like unto the birth of nafs from ruh [the soul] . . . The male of the sons of Adam from the form of the universal soul . . . the female from the form of universal nafs. In the form of the female no prophet has been sent" (1891:78). Thus women, and especially female sexuality, are associated with nafs.

Since men and women both have nafs and 'aql, from one perspective they are viewed as the same; they are both natural from nafs and cultural from 'aql, to use the standard anthropological dichotomy (Ortner 1974). Further, the ideology includes another aspect which associates women with nafs. This aspect, however, differentiates men from women where women seem more a part of the natural than men. As a comment about the nature of women, this component is linked most often to male statements. Women informants are inclined to view men as having excessive nafs also, but women's views of men's nature have not become part of the standard ideology (Compare Dwyer 1978:150-155). Thus, the ideology of gender contains two somewhat contradictory modes of viewing the sexes. On the one hand, men and women are the same and both are judged according to their conformance with Islamic norms and their concern for the social order. On the other hand, men and women are different and both are judged according to their intrinsic nature which is generally perceived as negative by the opposite sex.

Another associated contradictory element has been noted with particular reference to female sexuality. Mernissi has stated that one theory of sexuality and sexual dynamics is that men are aggressive and women are passive (1975:4). Women informants frequently made this kind of statement. The other theory is that women have a destructive power (fitna) which they use to tempt and control men (Mernissi 1975:5). This classical Islamic perspective is used by women to make comments about other women and by men to make comments about women.

Who is Lustful? Men or Women

In the indigenous ideology, the interactive relationship of men and women can be described as one of four possibilities: incest tabooed, marriage, veiling, or adultery. These possibilities deal with the inherent attraction between the sexes based on nafs and with whether the resulting sexual fulfillment is permitted for the good of the social order. Within the household, marriage allows sexual fulfillment and procreation and the incest taboo prohibits it. on everyday occasions, those within the household eat together, usually from the same platter. When there are male or female guests, rules appropriate outside the household are followed within, and men and women eat separately. Thus, a clear distinction between household members and outsiders is highlighted through eating patterns.

Outside the household, adultery allows sexual fulfillment but this creates fitna, social disorder. Veiling, according to the ideology, precludes sexual fulfillment outside the household.[7] The four interactive possibilities are closely linked so that discussion of one frequently leads to discussion of others. What seem like minor infractions, such as a man and woman talking together, outside the household would most closely approximate adultery in the structural classification and would be viewed as such (Table 1).

Informants link the wearing of the veil outside the household to Qur'anic injunction. Sura 24, 31 of the Qur'an mentions several categories of male kinsmen and in fact defines relatives, with the exception of the husband, to whom the incest taboo applies. In the presence of these specific categories of men, women are unveiled. Informally, these categories are expanded to include those who are defined socially, not genealogically, as included. In front of these men, women carry on normal daily tasks.

Clearly, one meaning of the veil associates it with the household. Within compound walls, the protection against outsiders is complete. Never are men brought into the compound without a warning call. The sexual excitation which is believed to exist when a strange man and woman meet face to face is prevented within the compound.[8] When a woman leaves the compound wearing the veil, she symbolically carries her compound walls with her (Papanek 1982:35). At one level of meaning, the veil announces that the wearer is behaving in the proper manner and has eliminated the possibility

of sexual desire and interaction. However, veiling can have other meanings, for why should a "proper" woman seek to leave her household?

The typical symbolic associations of the veil may be manipulated and reversed by individual women. Women themselves criticized women of other ethnic groups for using the veil to conduct illicit sexual adventures. One story was told about a woman who wished to receive certain bazaar items cheaply. She dressed herself with care, putting on cosmetics as if she were going to a party and went to a shop to make a deal with the shopkeeper. In the shop, she raised her veil and flirted with the owner. They agreed that she would meet him there for sexual relations, and in return, would receive goods from the store. The woman's identity in this situation remained secret since she wore the veil to and from her assignation (see Anderson 1982-3:417f). The veil is thus linked to adultery. On the one hand it is supposed to prevent adultery; on the other hand, it can be used to promote it. Thus, veiling itself may be symbolically powerful for women, since it provides an escape mechanism from the control of men. The power of veiling may lie precisely in its ambiguity: does it protect the proper woman or shield the improper woman?

The reluctance of men to allow their women to go frequently to the bazaar by themselves may be related to their fears of adulterous affairs, even though these fears seem exaggerated when compared to actual incidences of adultery, which are rare. Two significant anthropological interpretations of this fear of adultery link it either to men's fear of woman's nature via psychological mechanisms or to an attempt to metaphorically constrain contact between men and women. The former position is taken by Mernissi who says, "Since saturation of the sexual impulse for males requires polygamy, one can speculate that fear of its inverse -- one woman with four husbands might explain the assumption of women's insatiability, which is at the core of the Muslim concept of female sexuality" (1975:16). In this interpretation, women want to commit adultery, or so men believe.

The other line of interpretation is taken by Anderson:

> . . . sexual infidelity is less a real concern than a worst case metaphor for contact of any sort between men and women outside a korwal [Pakhtun-household] frame, for Pakhtun constitute as untoward even talking to or looking at an adult of the opposite sex outside one's kor whether married or not. As a worst case metaphor it seems to be adopted in preference to a more delicate one for its didactic value and dramatic imprint . . . "unchastity" and the implications of rapine and temptation are poetic euphemisms for concretizing in the most dramatic terms a categorical interdiction on contact between men and women who are not korwala (1982-3:401).

Both of these interpretations may, in fact, be correct. Adultery is linked in the minds of men to notions of woman's nature, to nafs, and to

sexual insatiability. This is the kind of viewpoint a man will express when speaking about women in the abstract. Men, however, do not necessarily think that their own women are as uncontrolled as the abstract statements would indicate. It is the women from other ethnic groups who are viewed as temptresses who do not know how to behave properly. One male informant coupled his distrust of foreign women with possessiveness about the women of his own group. "Everyone is always trying to marry our girls, because it is well known that they know how to keep the household in proper order." This man implicitly attributes 'aql to women of his own group. Thus, when men speak of woman in the abstract, they stress her passionate nature, but when they speak of particular (specific) cases, they relate appropriate behavior to male/female interaction in their own group. Men may comment about the wives of men in their own group positively or negatively, provided the husband is not present. Men will even comment upon the lustful behavior of men -- the active principle of sexuality as opposed to women's passivity.[9] Clearly, the social contact of discourse defines the selection of meaningful symbolic statements, abstract or particular, positive or negative.

Women also comment about men's nature in the abstract, but speak of the men in their own group differently. Their ideology, rather than being identical to men's, is complementary, incorporating the systematic linkage between marriage, adultery, and veiling. Women put forward a perspective about themselves and men that emphasizes their own self-control and men's lack of it. If women are ruled by nafs, then so are men. Women do not express these views before men, but they do express them in their own groups (see also Dwyer 1978:151-2).

Women believe that they are vulnerable and must be protected from men by other men, household kinsmen, or symbolically through the veil. One day, while flipping through a Persian-English dictionary, a woman informant came across the word, shahwat, lust; she commented that only men and a few evil women are lustful and that most women are not. This woman linked sexual insatiability to man's nature. The man, however, is not really to blame for his nature. It is up to the woman to avoid arousing him or she will pay the price. Women are, then, not temptresses but victims, who are vulnerable to male lust (Papanek 1982:12, 36). But this vulnerability is a two-edged sword, for there is also vulnerability to one's own desires (Vatuk 1982:59). At women's celebrations, sexual themes, vocabulary, and teasing also stress women's active enjoyment of sexual relations. In addition, to the context dependent nature of this discourse, such language may be a kind of psychological safety-valve, given the necessity of sexual propriety in the presence of men (Pastner 1974:411).

Subtle behavioral indicators demonstrate women's fear of male lust and their avoidance of interaction with men of other ethnic groups. If a group of men were standing on a corner near the gate to the lane, women would not leave the security of the compound walls even with their veils down. If groups of men were standing on street corners where the women hired horsecarts to take them to the bazaar, the women would walk on instead of

stopping. When riding in a taxi or horsecart, a male kinsman would always sit next to the driver and women would sit on the other side of the kinsman and in the back. As many children as possible would be piled between the driver and his female passengers. Avoidance of men is proportionate to the men's ethnic distance from the woman's own ethnic group. Thus, muhajir women were more fearful of Turkmens than of Uzbek men; Pashtuns were to be feared even more. Women believed that men in other groups regularly beat their women and mistreated them. The ethnographer was constantly warned against visiting people in other ethnic groups, because the men were considered untrustworthy. This expressed fear of other groups' men is a widespread cultural pattern. During a visit with some Pashtun families near Kabul, the women had heard that the ethnographer was living with Uzbeks. They were amazed since they were sure Uzbek men, if not men of northern Afghanistan, were wild and evil. Fear of men is explicitly related to men's insatiability, frequent desire for sexual intercourse, rough treatment, women's frequent pregnancies, and their fear that other wives or prostitutes would be favored.

At the abstract level, much of the preceding is symbolic of ethnic hostility as well as gender hostility. In fact, the analogy between ethnic groups and the sexes is apt. While ethnicity and gender are differentiated realms, they are mutual metaphorizations of each other.[10] Both ethnicity and gender in Afghanistan link to the sphere of prestige relations. Thus, men and women share the structural set which classifies the interaction between the sexes as incest tabooed, marriage, adultery, and veiling, while at the same time each sex also tends to view the other as intrinsically different. The difference is perceived, expressed, and accentuated through the mechanism and ideology of ethnic distancing.

Men on Women's Nature

Though men could speak privately of individual women as possessing good character, they also used a categorical symbol for woman. They spoke of a female creature called an almasti, which apparently is a negative symbol for women beyond the control of men. Supposedly, a woman who does not purify herself for forty days, obviously including one menstrual period, becomes an almasti. Though impure, the almasti gains the power to disappear, to cause illness and insanity. Her powers are thus similar to those of the jinn in standard Islamic folk belief. Interestingly, there is no discernible Islamic context that relates to almasti. The almasti is the only case for the muhajirin in which a popular belief in a supernatural creature is neither linked to the Qur'an nor to any Islamic heroic figure.

Almasti are symbolic figures indigenous to Central Asia. In addition to the data here, similar beliefs are reported for northwest Afghanistan (Jarring 1938:89), Badakhshan (Shahrani: personal communication), and the Kirghiz (Shahrani 1979:123f). Snesarev, reporting on southern Uzbekistan groups, (1971:338) describes the albasti as a dwarfed woman with long flowing hair who loves to torture horses and braid their manes. (In

addition to the variant pronunciations "almasti" and "albasti," "alwasti" is reported by Uzbek informants and in Chagatay and Sjoberg (1955:93) for Tashkent Uzbeks.) Descriptions of the almasti are similar to that of the important female jinn of North African folk belief, 'Aisha Qandisha (Crapanzano 1977, Mernissi 1975:12, Dwyer 1978:114, 137-8). However, an important difference is that informants did not state almasti were able to possess men. Various comments from informants are summarized below.

Informant's statement 1. Almasti have long dirty hair which they comb constantly. They smell bad. They like to sit in dark places especially near the water channel opening in abandoned compound walls.

Informant's statement 2. A household used to own a horse with an exceptionally long mane. Every morning for a week, they woke up to find the mane of this horse braided. Everyone believed this was done by an almasti.

Informant's statement 3. Almasti have a book which they keep under their arm. This book enables them to disappear. If you creep up behind them, twist their hair, hit them on the head, and take the book, they are under your power. You can call them and they must do whatever you wish. One man obtained a strange stone with white markings from an almasti. One day when he went to make ablution for prayer at a stream, a woman's hand reached out and tore his clothing. Later he saw the woman go behind a tree. He grabbed her and wouldn't let her go. She gave him the stone as a protection against evil. I myself have seen this stone.

Incident. The ethnographer attended a women's gathering within the neighborhood which was also attended by several woman teachers from the girls' high school. These women did not wear the standard veil. Returning from the evening prayers at the local mosque, the head of a nearby household, a man over 60 years of age, got a clear view of these women as they left and entered the lane. After the ethnographer and the old man reached his household compound, he said sarcastically, "Did you see all the almasti at the gathering?"

Analysis. The statements given above were made by men. Older women may also make admonishing statements, referring to young women behaving improperly as "almasti." The almasti is associated with ritual impurity, since the "impure" state of the menstrual period is allowed to continue. This association with blood makes the almasti a "hot" symbol, in the hot/cold division of temperament, food, and disease classification derived from the Galenic system of humoral medicine and widely reported for the Middle East and South Asia folk tradition (Penkala 1980; Kurin 1984:212). The "hot" symbol, blood, is contrasted with the "cold" symbol, milk (Kurin 1984:212). Thus, as is reported for the Kirghiz, the almasti is a threat to women in childbirth (Shahrani 1979:123f). Women in their proper role produce and nurture children, thereby maintaining the social order. The almasti, the symbol of the improper woman, thus threatens women who seek to fulfill their proper role.

Sexual intercourse is also classified as a "hot" activity (Kurin 1984:212). Improper sexual desire is indicated in the statement about the man whose clothing was torn by the almasti. Though the almasti is in a state of impurity and insatiable desire, she gains power that is not available to ordinary women who are properly purified and who, under the control of men, regulate their sexual desire. Significantly, from a male viewpoint, the almasti, though powerful, can still be controlled by men who, in effect, usurp her power, provided that they behave properly (that is, resist her sexual advances). The almasti's power is associated with a book of magical arts; women generally are considered to have too much interest in magic as well (Rosen 1984:37).

In addition to the association with menstrual blood, there is the double symbolic association with hair, both the almasti's own hair and the horse's mane. The almasti have long filthy hair which they comb constantly. The long hair indicates that almasti are outside of the social order (Hallpike 1969). Also, the fact that long hair and blood cross the body's boundaries and thus are magical pollutants also links as a threat to the social order. Douglas (1966) argues that the body is symbolic of societies. Danger from bodily emissions is therefore danger from beyond the confines of society. Women, having more bodily emissions than men, can be used as more representative of the dangers to the social group. The almasti and, by derivation, women, are therefore associated with fitna, social disorder. The almasti's unclean hair is further associated with unplucked female pubic hair, which is defiling. A woman informant once stated that kāfirs, or "unbelievers" (in this case, Hindus), are very sinful and that they allow their pubic hair to grow long so that they can braid it. Almasti braid horses' manes; thus, the almasti are also a symbol of kāfirs, the "unbelievers" outside the Muslim umma (community).

The association with horses also has two facets. Assuming that the horse is a male, a phallic symbol, and another "hot" symbol (Shalinsky 1980a:188; Penkala 1980:210), the almasti can be viewed as either possessing a phallus herself or at least having the ability to control a phallus. She is always pictured as sitting on top of the horse. If she has a phallus, she must have stolen it from a man and thus is a classic castrating female. Mernissi has made this point about 'Aisha Qandisha in Morocco (1975:12).

The almasti thus provides a symbolic commentary on the nature of women. The connection to social disorder, fitna, is clear. Women gain a disruptive power, becoming almasti, if they are not controlled. The symbolic figure of the almasti does not reflect "real life" behavior of women who take pains to perform ritual purification after the menstrual period. Women call the time of their period be-namaz, the time without prayer. Since these women, like the men, place a high value on religious observance, they view the menstrual period as a time of pollution, not a source of power.

The closest male counterpart to the almasti are dew (div in Iranian Persian), ugly giants who possess and/or steal women. However, the folk tradition does not account for their origins as transformations of ordinary

men. Yet, people may refer to lustful men as divmard (Haim 1961:371). Children or young men who do not behave properly are often admonished through animal terms, particularly "donkey" or "cow," when their behavior is corrected by parents or elders. Thus, animality is used to characterize a person whose behavior is not controlled by 'aql.

Women on the Depravity of Both Sexes

While women sometimes make categorical statements which depict men as lustful and their own sex as self-controlled, they frequently discuss moral behavior of both sexes through story-telling. The following narrative recounted to me by a 26-year-old woman describes her first pregnancy and childbirth experiences. Though apparently based on actual events some ten years prior to the recounting, analysis of this narrative will treat it as a mythic text and as an example of a "worst case metaphor" for male-female relations. A man, married to one sister, impregnates another sister; this creates an adulterous union with incestuous overtones and approximates the Qur'anic rule against marriage with two sisters (The Qur'an, Sura 4, 23). Both sexes demonstrate moral and immoral behavior in the story.

> The qāzi [judge] had one wife who died leaving a daughter. He then married the elder of two sisters. As is common custom, the younger sister often visited the household. Unknown to the elder sister, during these visits the younger had sexual relations with the qāzi. Eventually, the younger sister was given to a good boy in marriage. When the boy went to have intercourse with her for the first time, he noticed she had a big stomach. She told him that she had a pain there. Actually, she was six months pregnant. The qāzi remained at the house with the bride and groom and finally kicked the groom out telling him that the woman was his. Three months later when the child was born, the qāzi put it to sleep naked under the bukhāri [wood burning stove], cooked it to death, and buried it in the yard. From that time on, he and the younger sister slept in one house on the compound, and the older sister, who by then knew what was going on, slept in another house in the same compound.
>
> The two sisters had a brother who was a teacher in another town. This man threatened his brother-in-law, the qāzi, who refused to take the threats seriously and give up the younger sister. As the qāzi returned from work, and the younger sister went out to greet him dressed in the fine clothes he had given her, the brother shot them both five times as they stood embraced. They both died. The police imprisoned the brother who was allowed special privileges because everyone knew he had done the proper thing. In fact, the qāzi had previously wronged the brother who had been promised his first daughter. She had been given to another much richer man.

It is said that the qāzi and the younger sister were buried in adjoining graves far from other gravesites so that their evil could defile only each other.

To recapitulate the story, the qāzi and his wife's sister violated the incest taboo and had sexual relations. The qāzi eventually lived with the younger sister in a quasi-marital relationship and favored her over the socially sanctioned wife. Aided by the elder sister, the sisters' brother killed the qāzi and the younger sister to protect family honor. The story thus combines and plays with the symbolic statements that compare and contrast marriage and adultery. Here adultery, which is usually defined as sexual relations outside the household, is brought inside the household and is made more dramatic through a connection with incest. The qāzi and younger sister are given no positive qualities. He breaks an engagement contract and a marriage contract; she lies; he kills their child. Similarly, the true wife and her brother demonstrate only positive qualities. She remains in the compound, thus showing fidelity, patience, and obedience. He protects the reputation of his family. In fact, the text precisely contrasts the attributes of the good Muslim and the "unbeliever" whose nafs is unrestrained.

> "The jahil [unbeliever] does evil deeds; he lies; he fornicates; he murders. He is impetuous, passionate, and reckless, for he lacks good judgment and self-control . . . His actions do not stem from virtue, but from arrogance. He is proud, assertive, and unwilling to believe in God . . . His lack of religious belief, of moral integrity, and of good behavior are all of a piece" (Lapidus 1984:41).

The qāzi's arrogance is clearly shown in his flaunting of the relationship and his unwillingness to give it up. His nafs is unrestrained not only in sexual behavior but also in greed; he gave his daughter to a rich man, he adorned the sister in fine clothes. The qāzi, an official governmental appointee, has the most wealth and power and is described as seeking only his own pleasure; he is completely immoral. Often applied to real government officials as well as to those in folk tales, this is a standard depiction of the notion that "power corrupts."

The narrative is not clear about whether the younger sister or the qāzi initiated sexual relations. The fact that the sister is mentioned first may indicate that she tempted and the qāzi succumbed; however, he followed her to the bridegroom's house and prevented her proper marriage. The narrative implies mutual culpability in that they are simultaneously shot and they are buried side by side apart from others. It may be significant that the storyteller, a woman, finds both at fault and clearly does not subscribe to the ideology that sexual immorality is always the woman's fault. Friedl (1978:649), has noted that, typically in folk tales, women are punished more harshly for adultery than men, since it is the misuse of their sexual power over men that is perceived as causing the incident. However, it is the context and speakers' purposes which are determining factors in story selection.

Men will discuss women's sexual appetites and adulterous unions to indicate the importance of controlling the nafs to achieve the proper life; if unmarried, they may discuss with anticipation the pleasures of the married state. Men will acknowledge that some women, usually near kin, are virtuous and may be the victims of male lust. Jarring's Uzbek informant, a young man from Andkhoi, told a story in which a mullah attempts to seduce an innocent girl by forcing her to help with his bath. She struggles, escapes, and eventually is rewarded for her virtue (Jarring 1938:36-42). The informant notes that his grandmother told him the story so he would not act like the mullah. Thus, like this grandmother, women are likely to use their stories as warnings about lustful men. An extremely popular genre, another variant of the mullah's attempted seduction of the virtuous girl is reported for Eastern Turkistan (Jarring 1948).[11]

There are several similarities between the qāzi/sister text and Middle Eastern didactic folk tales. The sisters stand in an adversary relationship to each other and, in fact, are both sisters and co-wives -- a double adversary relationship (see Friedl 1978:641, 648). The brother is the main protector of his sister's virtue, often the case when the father is absent or dead (Friedl 1978:647).

Both men in the story are identified with occupational titles, while the women are given kinship roles. Anthropologists have mentioned this characteristic as typical for many cultures. ". . . categories of femaleness are not generated with abstract symmetry to masculinity but in terms of women's relationships with men and in terms of the relevance of those relationships to male prestige" (Ortner and Whitehead 1981:19).

The narrative thus relates a kind of morality play which describes the consequences of those who put their own interests and passions (nafs) above those of the social group. The evil of the qāzi and the younger sister includes not only their own damnation, but also causes the complete seclusion of the older sister (not mentioned in the narrative) and the imprisonment of the brother. The whole group suffers as a result of the improper behavior of these two. Thus, by contrast, the virtue of putting group interests above one's own is exemplified.

Conclusions

Anthropological theory on gender ideologies has recently focused on a key contrast between the way men and women are perceived in many cultures. This contrast, the opposition between self-interest and the social good, generally links women to particularistic concerns which benefit them and their families (self interest), while men are credited with concern for the society at large (the social good) (Ortner and Whitehead 1982:7-8). Many cultures include within this opposition a tendency to define men in terms of status or role categories, but to define women in relational terms; that is, they always view women as linked to a man as mother, wife, or sister rather than as a unit in and of herself.[12] An additional element in this

opposition is that women view social reality in terms of their interactions with others in the immediate vicinity, whereas men take a more abstract and conceptual view of social reality.

The Middle Eastern ethnographic literature has not reached consensus about the validity of this opposition for the region. Basically, there are two positions on the question. The first, and most similar to the generalizations stated above, is that women view the world interactively or socially and men categorically. "The women focus on the specifically social as opposed to natural relation between the sexes and therefore, their conceptual orientation is substantially different than that of men" (Rosen 1978:569, 1984:38).[13] The other view is that both women and men view the world interactively and that they are judged by their ability to demonstrate self-restraint for the sake of the social good (Anderson 1982-3).

It is also possible, however, that men and women are able to view the world both interactively and categorically. A careful reading of the extensive literature on Middle Eastern gender attitudes and relations and an analysis of my own informants' statements shows that both women and men are indeed able to do this given the appropriate context. Despite the fact that both possibilities, generalized denigration and specific evaluation, are available to each sex and will be expressed given the appropriate social context, there is a tendency for men to make more categorical statements and for women to explain and evaluate behavior in terms of social relations. Thus, men can speak of the almasti and use it as a categorical metaphor for women. While women can speak of men as lustful, they tend to describe incidents where men and women alike demonstrate both good and bad behavior. The explanation for this tendency may be men's greater familiarity with the abstract conceptual scheme found in Islamic texts linking fitna (disorder), nafs (passion), and the necessity for their control via the restraining force of 'aql (reason). Women are as familiar as men with the need for evaluative concepts of virtues and vices as well as their use in social negotiation, but women's concepts are more likely to be embedded and expressed within descriptions of life events.

Notes

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1 For additional information about the current situation of the Fārghana muhajirin, see Shalinsky 1982-83 and 1984.

2 Angels are a complex case. In some cases when nafs is used in the sense of the soul or life essence, angels are said to possess nafs (Rosen 1984:31). When used to mean desire, angels are said to lack nafs (Kurin 1984:198). It was apparently not used as a characteristic of angels in the Qur'an (Gibb and Kramer 1953:28).

3 Ruh in early Islamic poetry means "breath" or wind." This usage appears in the Qur'an passages in the sense of "the breath of life" where the creation of Adam is described. Ruh also seems to imply special prophetic ability in the Qur'an (Gibb and Kramers 1953:28-9). Ruh is first used to refer to the human soul in thirteenth-century poetry; this concept developed into the idea that the soul gains salvation when it is freed from corporeal substances. The equation of ruh with soul or spirit is especially important in sufism (Gibb and Kramers 1983:29).

4 Kulliyāti Chahār Kitāb, the text used in the mosque school by the muhajirin, is compiled from many written and oral sources, some of which are specified in the text. It is a collection of simple yet elegant Persian prose and poetry which can be grasped by the popular audience. Kulliyāt contains material on the basic tenets of the faith, ritual purity and pollution, the appropriate performance of prayers and other duties, regulation of family relations, the proper conduct of rulers, the truth of Mohammed's prophecy, and the existence of God. Traditionally, it was also recited at tea houses or at other social gatherings. Analysis of the texts are found in Shahrani (1985).

5 For examples of this evaluation process, see Shalinsky (1979:5) in which religious knowledge about proper behavior was used as part of an ethnic contest between a muhajir and a Pashtun, (a member of Afghanistan's dominant ethnic group) and Shalinsky (1980b), in which kindness to orphans, a Qur'anic command, is used to justify an interethnic marriage.

6 Other examples from Eastern Turkistan are found in Jarring (1946:132)

> From mud puddles on the road,
> From curds that have gone rotten,
> My God, deliver us.
> From the thorny branches of the wild apricot
> From second-rate women,
> My God, deliver us.
> From clods in the fallow,
> From women who go idle and slander,
> My God, deliver us.
> From the nosebag of a stallion,
> From women who are thieves,
> My God, deliver us.

Proper behavior is also listed: keep the children clean, wash clothes, prepare good food for the husband and his guests, milk and feed the cow (Jarring 1951:88-91).

7 One psychological explanation for veiling theorizes: Sexual impulses (in Muslim societies) are seen as overwhelmingly strong and difficult for a person to resist as if the impulse were external to the person . . . Much of the burden of impulse control is shifted to social institutions and mediated through control of interaction" (Papanek 1982:35).

8 As part of adultery, al-Ghazali stresses "fornication by the eye" which may lead to the overt act. The Prophet (Mohammed) is often quoted as saying that when a woman approaches, she approaches in the image of the devil; so if anyone sees a woman who appeals to him, let him approach his wife, for she has what the woman has (Farah 1984:17, 33). Thus, the notion of the immediate awakening of desire at first sight has a long tradition in Islamic ideology.

9 An example of the strength of male sexual activity is cited by Jarring's informant (1946:120):

> If one gives a horse to somebody who has never mounted a horse,
> he will ride it to death.
> If one gives a woman to somebody who has never seen a woman,
> he will fuck her to death.

10 This point is made by Ortner and Whitehead (1982:18) for Indian caste and gender systems.

11 During fieldwork, I entertained women's gatherings by reading Jarring's stories. The story of the mullah and the innocent girl was most frequently requested by young married and older women.

12 In Muslim societies, this linkage of women as kin to men undoubtedly relates to men's obligation to teach women 'ilm, knowledge and

performance of religious duties (Shahrani 1985:33), and to the need to control women's nafs for the sake of the social order.

13 Rosen acknowledges that women may refer to men's nature as intrinsically worthless or childish (that is, categorically) and that men may likewise speak of actual relationships (that is, view women interactively) (1984:39). Still, he emphasizes the different primary orientations.

TABLE 1

	INTERACTIVE MODES	
	Sexual Interaction	Daily Non-Sexual Interaction
Marriage	+	+
Incest tabooed	-	+
Adultery	+	-
Veiling	-	-

	CONTEXT OF INTERACTION	
	Inside the Household	Outside the Household
Marriage	+	-
Incest tabooed	+	-
Adultery	-	+
Veiling	-	-

The charts indicate the closely linked features of the set. Veiling is structurally opposite marriage, the latter representing extreme intimacy and the former extreme distance. The incest tabooed relationship and adultery are intermediate positions in this scale and may in some cases be symbolically transformed to comment about the other interactive modes.

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